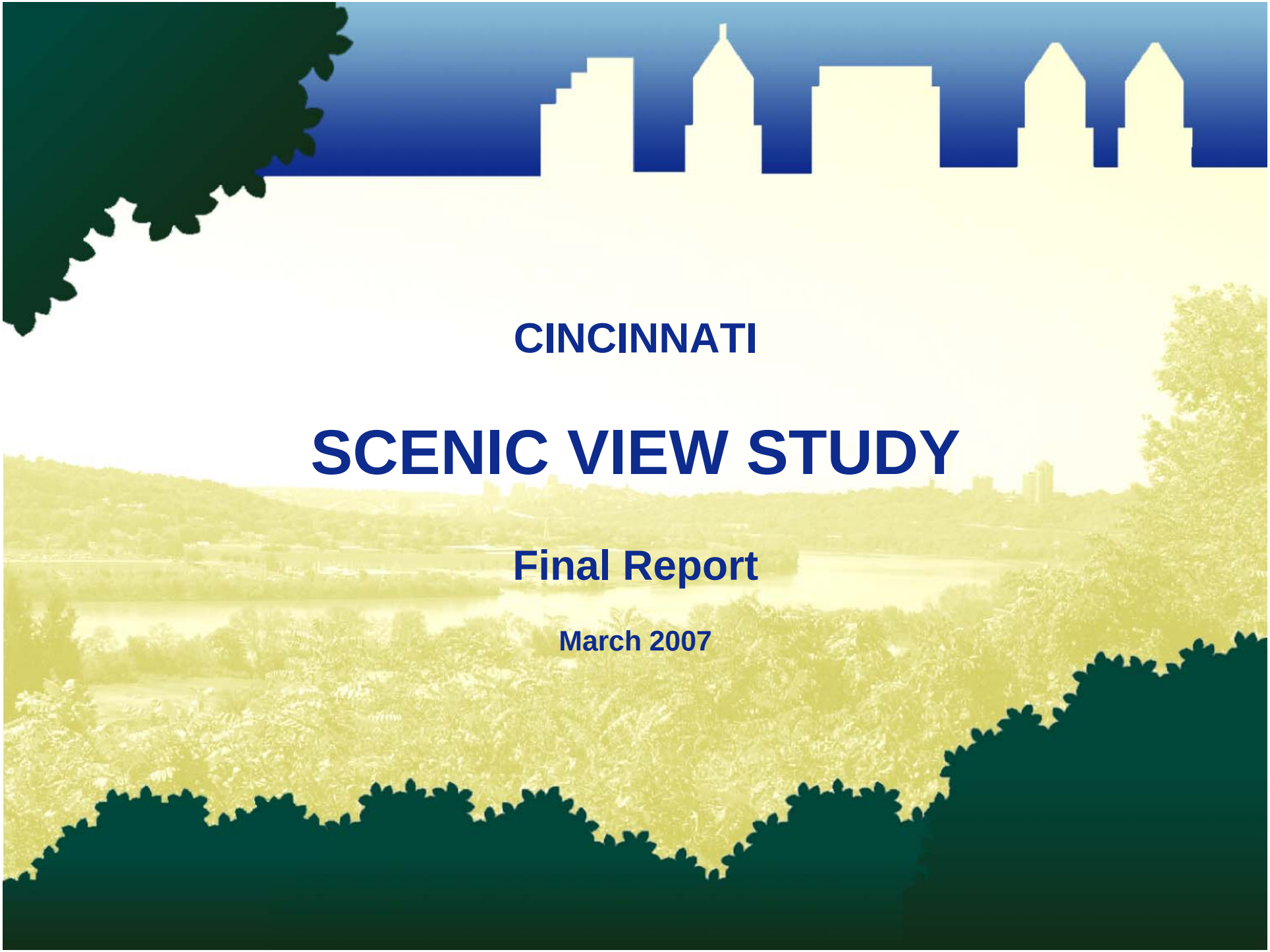

CINCINNATI

SCENIC VIEW STUDY

Final Report

March 2007

Table of Contents

CITY OF CINCINNATI

Department of Transportation and Engineering
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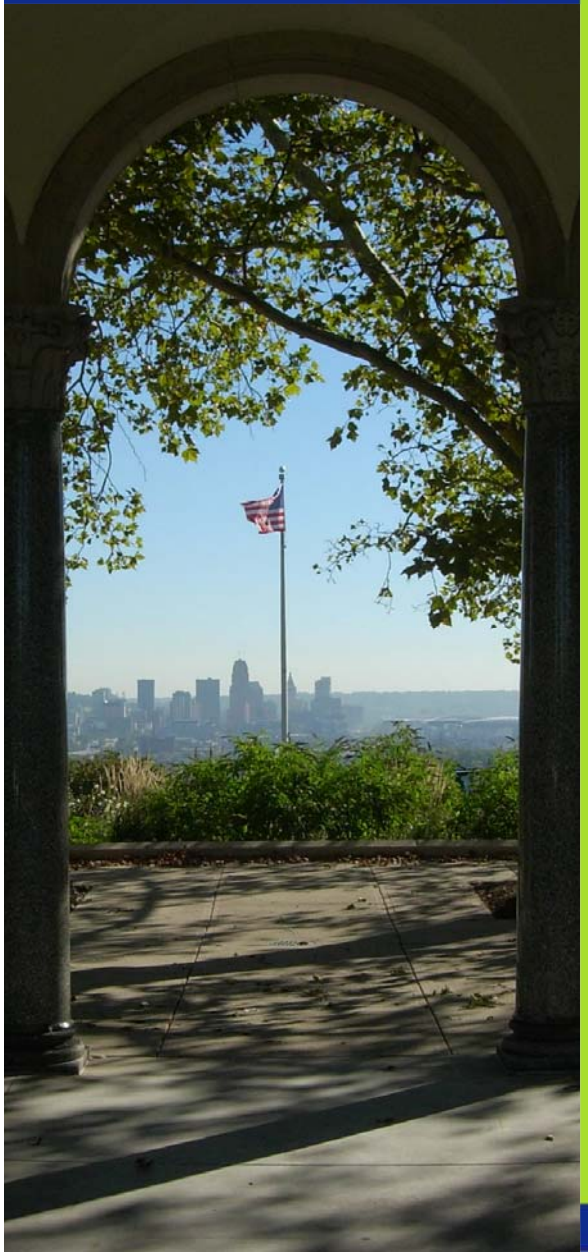


Executive Summary

Executive Summary

March 2007

Cincinnati is endowed with a remarkable network of "precipitous hills that thrust themselves into the heart of the city," as landscape architect George Kessler so aptly reflected 100 years ago. It is well-understood that Cincinnati's topography is both dramatic and unique among other mid-western cities, inspiring Winston Churchill to declare it as the most beautiful inland city in America. What may not be as well-recognized is the fact that the magnificent public views and vistas perched atop Cincinnati's hillsides are also unique to this region, further distinguishing the city from many of its suburban counterparts.

At a time when Cincinnati is struggling to maintain and attract population, and re-establish its former identity as a "most livable city" in America, a grand opportunity is available both to promote and to capitalize upon such a wonderful resource as our scenic hillsides. How can this be accomplished?

The first step is to understand what the city possesses in the way of its scenic resources. The foundation of this study is built upon a thorough inventory of all public viewing locations that encompass views primarily of downtown and/or the Ohio River. The essence of this inventory is captured photographically, the compositions of which are displayed in the Typologies section of this report. As much as anything, this photographic survey portrays Cincinnati more eloquently than words ever could, as a beautiful and inspiring urban landscape.

St. Rose Church and Ohio River valley

Numerically, the study identified 82 public viewing locations originating from hilltops and hillsides. It also sampled 11 locations with views towards the hillsides that were observed from valley floor locations in the downtown basin. This aspect of the study suggests that further work could be undertaken to inventory the vast network of hillsides that frame the downtown basin and Ohio River valley, as observed from low land perspectives.

Among the 82 public views enumerated, more than half (48) received a high priority protection rating based on a scoring matrix devised for this study. This matrix considered such factors as view quality, land use type of the view location (e.g., park land versus street right-of-way), the availability of the view year-round, and whether the view afforded a safe opportunity from (or within) vehicular traffic.

Executive Summary

March 2007

Geographically, 48 of the hilltop and hillside views are located in the east region, encompassing the neighborhoods of East Walnut Hills, Mt. Adams, Eden Park, Mt. Lookout, Hyde Park, Columbia-Tusculum, and the East End. The majority (25) of these east region views are concentrated in a relatively small area comprised of historic Eden Park and Mt. Adams.

The central region, consisting of Mt. Auburn, Liberty Hill, Prospect Hill, University Heights, Fairview, and Clifton, possesses 22 public viewing areas. The west region, comprised of lands west of the Mill Creek, contains 12 public viewing areas. This region includes the neighborhoods of East Price Hill and North Fairmount. To a location, public views originating from this region are among the highest quality of any location throughout the City.

Typologically, the study identified five different land use types in which public views are located. These typologies include parks, street rights-of-way (as vistas), street termini, public steps, and parkways (i.e. Columbia Parkway).

Street rights-of-way account for the highest total of public viewing locations with 29, followed by 28 viewing locations in 13 different City parks.

The next step identified in this report is to articulate various strategies and recommendations for preserving the quality and integrity of our scenic views. As Kessler noted in 1907, Cincinnati is "particularly adapted to a connected park system and it is a great source of wonder to me that the opportunities that nature has thrust into the hands of the city have so long been neglected."

The report discusses five broad strategies, ranging from education and awareness measures, and proactive vegetation management, to more involved efforts such as expanding connectivity between our parks and greenways, and retooling specific aspects of the zoning code. Establishing a viewshed conservancy is yet a fifth recommendation that would serve to address all but the full spectrum of zoning options mentioned in the report.

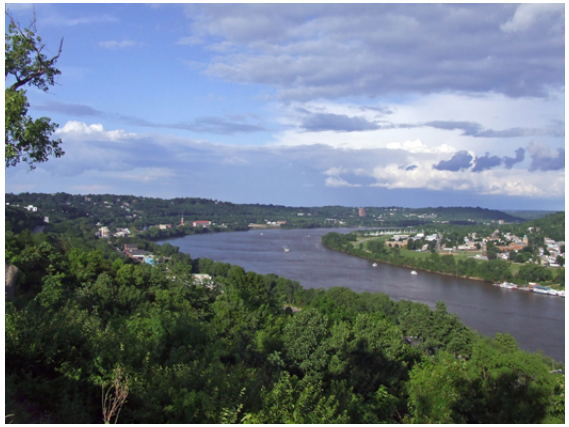
The difference between a planning document that collects dust versus one that is implemented, is determined in great measure by the broad base of support and level of commitment it receives. This report has made a strong argument on behalf of the beauty, value, and importance of maintaining and enhancing our public views. It has demonstrated that other cities with similar topographic features and scenic resources, including our upstream neighbor, Pittsburgh, have initiated similar programs to enhance quality of life issues for residents and visitors alike.

A key aspect of the success of this report will be in the City's desire and ability to establish a small blue-ribbon committee to assess the recommendations that have been put forth, and to create a critical mass for carrying them forward. Ideally, this group would consist of officials from various City departments, as well as representatives from key neighborhood groups, and from the private sector.

Executive Summary

March 2007

As responsible stewards of this city, it is our obligation to ensure that those civic resources and treasurers that are temporarily entrusted in our care will be both viable and available by the time we entrust them to succeeding generations. Anything less is irresponsible.



Eden Park Twin Lakes overlook

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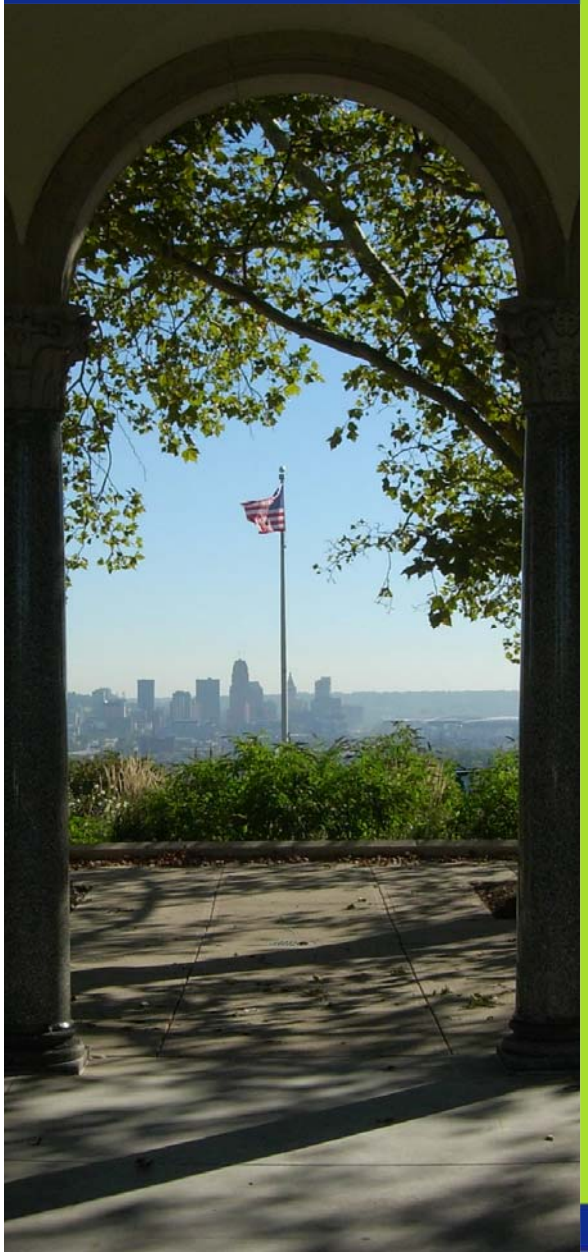
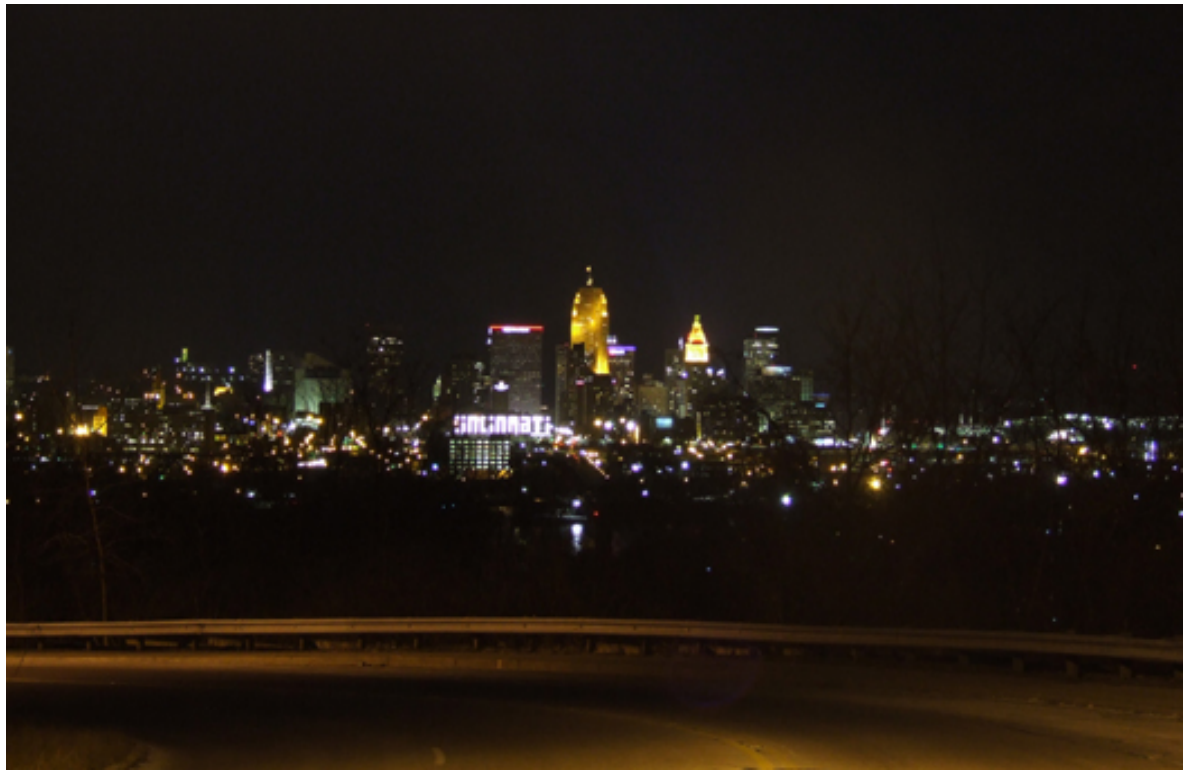


Acknowledgements

Acknowledgements

This study was carried out with the following partner individuals and organizations:

- Councilman David Crowley provided the vision of this study and the initiative to get the study funded and completed
- City of Cincinnati, Department of Transportation and Engineering Transportation Planning and Urban Design - funding, research, community meetings, integration with City policies and projects
- The Hillside Trust - research, GIS mapping, viewshed analysis, site photography, and recommendations
- Human Nature Landscape Architecture - GIS support, natural systems planning, graphics and presentation, and recommendations



City View from Elberon Avenue

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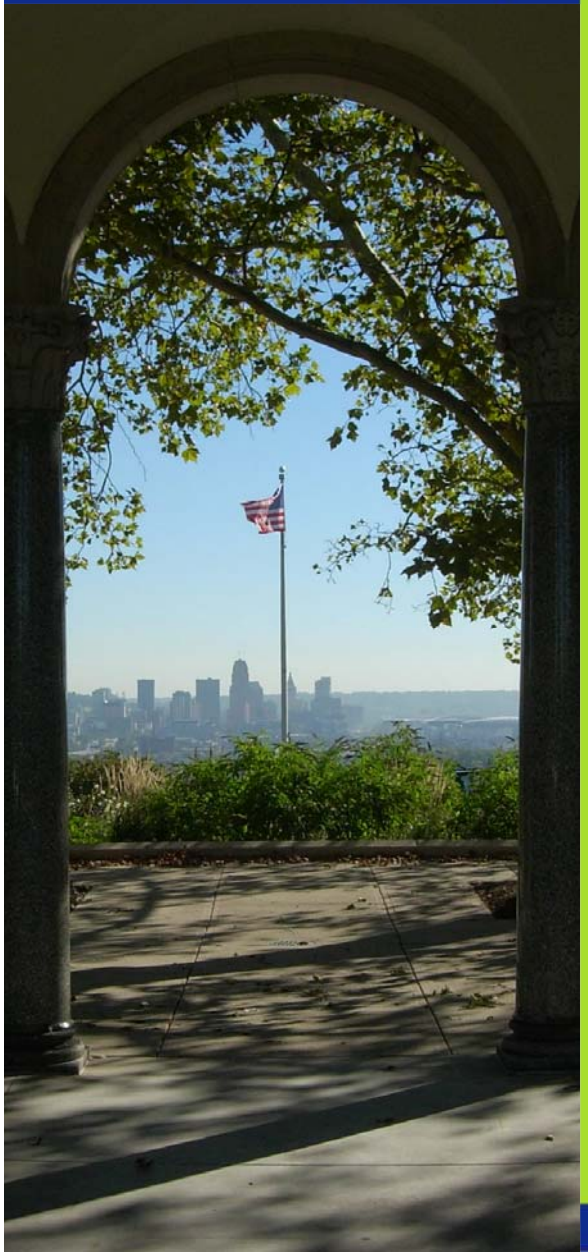


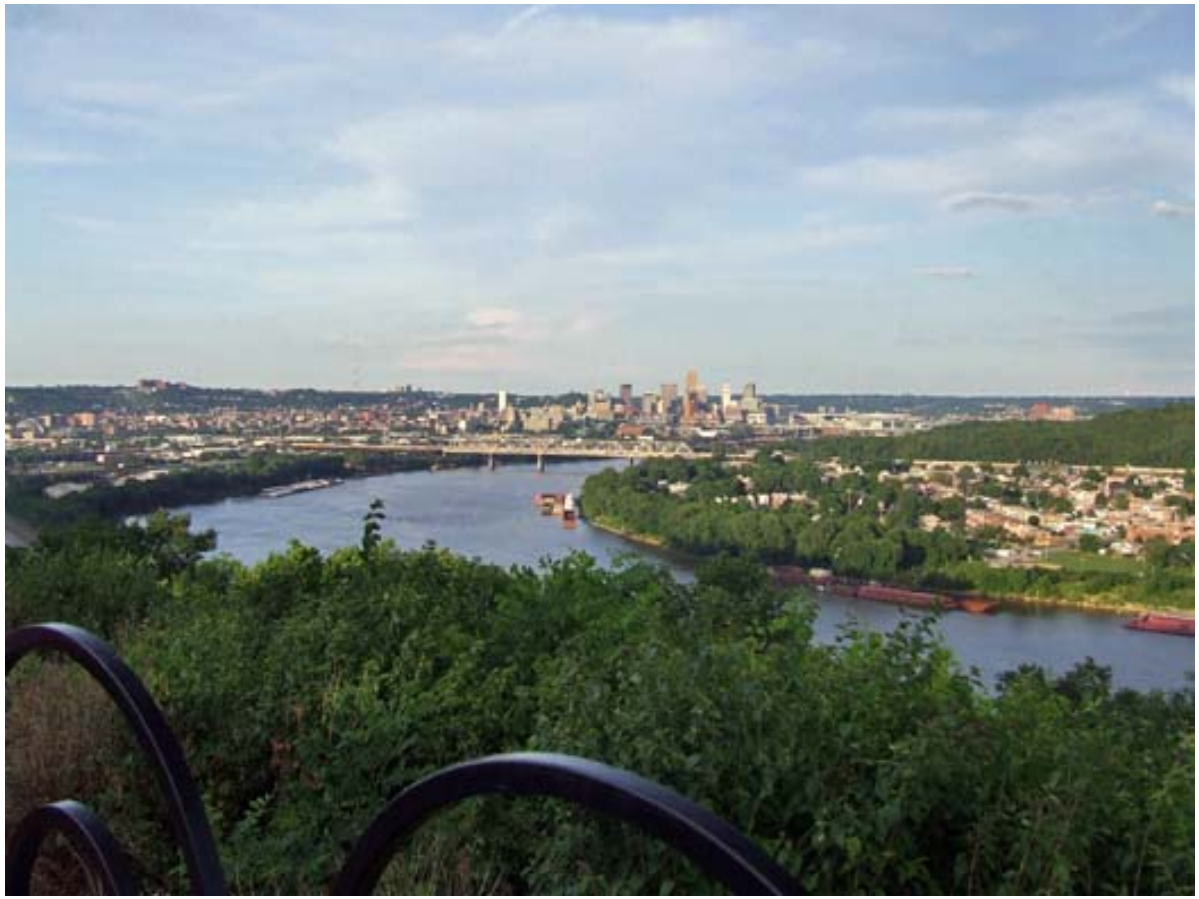
Introduction

Introduction

March 2007

Cincinnati is a green city – blessed with natural systems that are worthy of being preserved and celebrated as public assets. Its two primary natural features are its rivers and the picturesque hillsides that frame them. These systems provide unique scenic and ecological value to the region, and they are the connective tissue that link people and places together.

Cincinnati is fortunate to have an extraordinary resource like the Ohio River as its "spine," with hillsides that dramatically shape its course while sharply defining the boundaries of its downtown basin. The magnificent views enjoyed from these hillsides are uniquely special. They are a drawing card. Not only are they unrivaled in many other mid-western cities, at home they are unmatched in the majority of our suburban locales.



Mt. Echo Park

Introduction

March 2007

Cincinnati's natural landscape, combined with its high visual quality, confer a strong sense of community pride and cultural identity among its residents. There are a number of other social and economic benefits that would be fortified by protecting the beauty and integrity of these public views. These benefits include:

- Providing psychological relief from, and a counterpoint to, the built environment
- Providing orientation and a sense of place
- Providing a community asset as people are naturally drawn to locations where they can stand on higher ground and view large expanses, landmark features, and/or long distances.
- Enhancing private property values for surrounding owners
- Generating a corresponding increase in annual property taxes
- Providing opportunities for local and regional tourism and the service industries associated with them

As development and other market pressures come to bear, there have been numerous discussions regarding the protection of public views that are an amenity to this City. This is a rather complex issue, one which lacks any policies, plans, or recommendations to guide these discussions. That is changing with the completion of this seminal work.

The purpose of this study is twofold. One function is to conduct a visual survey to inventory and evaluate the respective quantity and quality of Cincinnati's scenic views. This stage provides the framework for better understanding the location and characteristics of our scenic views through photographic documentation and written descriptions, including priority protection rankings.

The second function of this study is to provide a palette of recommendations for the ultimate development and implementation of standards and regulations for public view protection. It is this aspect of the study which will benefit most from the efforts of a coordinated working committee to implement the most appropriate of these recommended actions.

The chapters to follow summarize the work of this study in this order:

- Methodology
- Typologies (Parks, Parkways, Public Steps, Termini, Valley Floor, and Vistas)
- Results
- Literature Review
- Recommendations

Following the major chapters of the report are two appendices. The first is a spreadsheet of all 82 public viewing locations and their descriptions. The second is a spreadsheet of all property information (owner, size, parcel id, etc.) for properties within the view cones from each of the 82 view locations (provided on CD).

City View from Goethe Street

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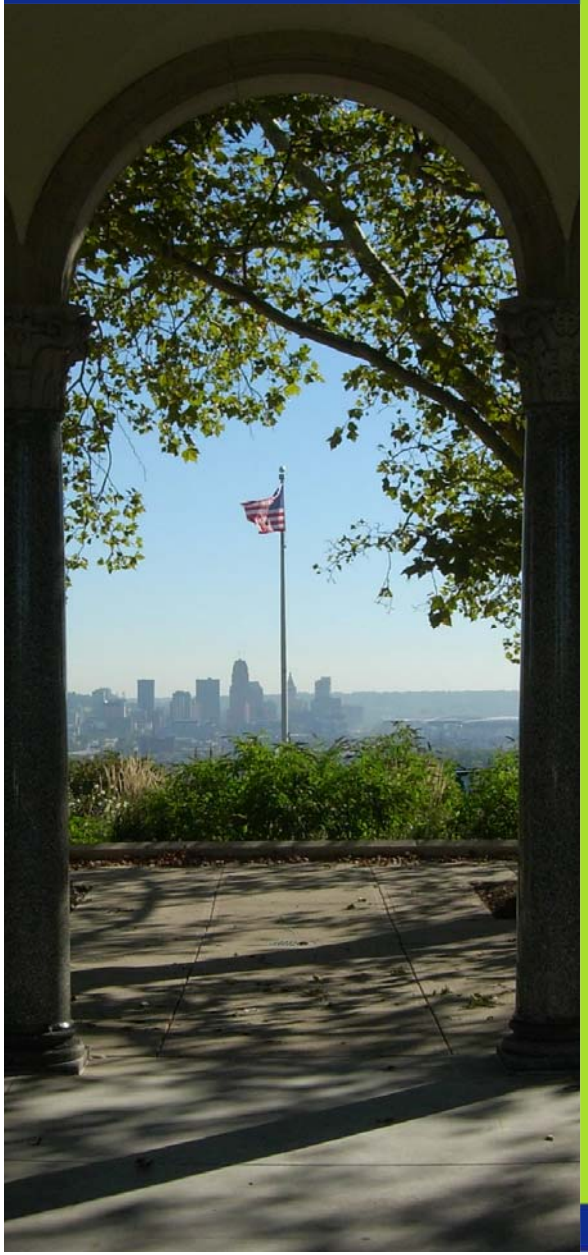


Methodology

Table of Contents

Methodology

March 2007

A starting point for discussing the methods of this study is to operationally define a number of key terms that appear in this report. The following definitions were provided by the City of Cincinnati in 2003, when the merits of undertaking this study were initially explored.

***View Shed**:* A panoramic view of an entire subject, such as the downtown basin from a hilltop location, or a view of the hillsides from the valley floor, that includes the full extent of the feature being observed.

***View Corridor**:* A view within the view shed that is defined with side edges, a view point and view angle. A view corridor may capture a portion of, or all of a view shed, or it may be defined between structures or vegetation allowing for a limited view.

***View Plane**:* A specific view corridor that establishes a height based on a reference point elevation and the lowest point of the desired view corridor. Essentially it is a line connecting the elevation of the view point and the lowest elevation of the view shed.

***Reference Point**:* A point at which an elevation is established by way of survey or topographic map, and a monument or marker is set to define the exact location that offers a scenic or panoramic view.

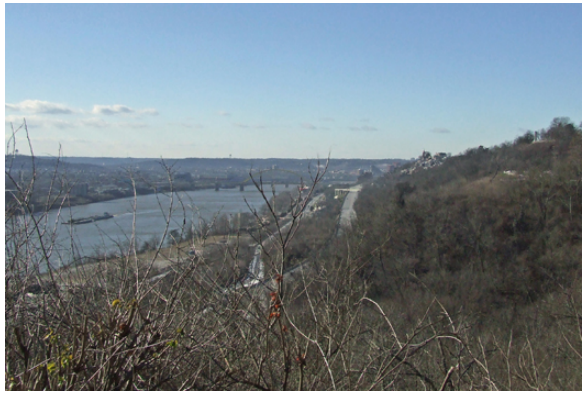
***View Point**:* A single point or series of points (for example, along a roadway) where the observer is located, that offers a scenic or panoramic view.

***Public View**:* A location where the public may congregate safely (out of the way of vehicular traffic) or within the confines of a vehicle (under safe driving conditions) that is available and accessible to all citizens.

Identifying and Qualifying Public Views

Initially, a public space was identified as any area that is comprised of street right-of-way (including parkways), street terminus, public steps, or any City park or recreation lands.

From there, a public space qualified as a public viewing location if it provided a view of the downtown skyline or basin, or the Ohio River valley, or if it captured views of the Little Miami River valley or the Mill Creek valley.



Edgecliff Point view – East Walnut Hills

In order to determine the location of Cincinnati's public viewing spaces, a geographic boundary (study area) was established within which public views either were known or believed to exist. This boundary extended from Ault Park on the east side, to Mt. Storm Park in the upland central region, to Mt. Echo Park on the west side, and all areas in between.

Methodology

March 2007

Numerous driving expeditions were made within the study area to examine and re-examine the view potential from all forms of public spaces that are located on hilltops or hillsides. Once a view point was confirmed or discovered, it had to meet the following criteria: Was the observed subject visible without obstruction for at least half the year when trees are dormant from late autumn to early spring? It is relevant to note that a handful of locations were identified in which public views partially existed when leaves are down, but the density of branch cover, especially honeysuckle, compromised the quality of the view such that it was not included in the final tabulation.

Vegetation blocking view at Filson Playground

The study discovered five "potential view" locations, understanding that vegetation management could transform each one into a bona fide public view. For a listing of these potential viewing locations, please see the Results section of the report.

The analysis then considered what was captured in the view shed or view corridor. Did it possess a view of the City skyline, downtown basin, landmark buildings or historical structures, or natural features such as the Ohio River? Perhaps most importantly of all, the analysis considered whether the public view could be enjoyed by pedestrian access, or from a motor vehicle, without putting the observer in harm's way.

Elements for Mapping a Public View

Once a location was identified as having a public view, the next step was to record and catalog its physical characteristics. Primarily, this included collecting latitude and longitude coordinates for each spot using a global positioning system (GPS) navigator.

It included delineating the width of the view (the left and right boundaries of the widest part of the available view when leaves are down), using a hand-held compass. Next, it involved recording the elevation (altitude) of each location via the GPS navigator.

Once these hard data were collected, Spatial Analyst Software was used to build a Digital Elevation Model (DEM) using local Cincinnati Area Geographic Information Systems (CAGIS) data. The DEM digitally replicated the topographic features of the entire study area as supplied by CAGIS, the accuracy of which falls within a range of plus or minus one foot. This model cross-checked the coordinates and elevations gathered from each location in addition to substantiating the presence of each public view. Because vegetation cover cannot be modeled by Spatial Analyst software, the DEM only recreates actual ground terrain. It is unable to represent any sort of vegetation layers, thus the model replicates a bare landscape. As such, a photograph of each public view space was taken to convey its overall character and quality.

Methodology
March 2007

Depending on such variables as the width of a view, and whether or not a view could be enjoyed year-round, a variety of compositions were photographed. Some locations were shot in panorama by stitching photographs together. Other locations were shot comparing leaves on versus leaves off. Still, other locations were shot illustrating the difference between daytime and nighttime perspectives.

Ranking the Overall Quality of Views

In addition to the collection, analysis and modeling of hard data, information was noted and collected about a site's physical amenities, its view quality, and whether or not the view can be enjoyed year round. This information, along with land use type (i.e., typology), was plugged into a scoring matrix to better assess the overall significance of each public view, ranking them on an overall point scale of 1 to 7. Points were assigned as follows.

Under land use type, a view was given 2 points if it originated from a park or along a parkway, 1 point if it originated from public steps or a dead end street (terminus), and 0 points if it originated from a street right-of-way (as vista). Park locations received the highest point value because they are the venues most likely to attract the greatest number of users, especially from a pedestrian standpoint. Similarly, parkway locations received the same high point value because they were established as scenic thoroughfares. Columbia Parkway is the only thoroughfare in the City's parkway system that was included in the study's final analysis. It possesses some extraordinary public views and it is used heavily by thousands of motorists each day. Public steps and dead end streets each received 1 point because they offer safe havens in which pedestrians (or sometimes motorists parked at a street terminus) can enjoy a particular view. Street rights-of-way received 0 points, primarily because their locations are more ubiquitous and because their view origin is not necessarily fixed or static, rather it often extends along a range of view perspectives.

Site amenities at St. Clair Park upper overlook

Site amenities include such features as benches, sidewalks, and viewing platforms for pedestrians, and the secure comfort of a vehicle for motorists. Some locations lacked site amenities altogether. They received 0 points in these instances, whereas those counterparts that had at least a bench, a viewing platform, or provided safe viewing perspectives for motorists, received 1 point.

View quality was the most subjective variable to score. It was based on the feature or features that are observable to the viewer, and the dramatic perspective and composition of the view itself. A high quality view, such as Bellevue Hill Park with a wide commanding view and many observable features, received 3 points.

Methodology
March 2007

A medium quality view, such as that available from the end of Walker Street in Mt. Auburn, with a view of the downtown skyline that is impinged by vegetation, received 2 points. A low quality view, such as Sachem Avenue, with a partial view of the Ohio River and a lot of foreground clutter such as buildings and utility wires, received 1 point.

Not all views are observable year-round. Some are only available when trees lose their leaves. Other views are only partially available when leaves are down, offering glimpses or small openings to observable features. Given these scenarios, locations with views available year-round were given 1 point, whereas those not available throughout the year were given 0 points. Locations which offered partial views during the "leaf out" season before opening up more fully during the winter were given a half point.

View locations with an overall score between 1 and 3 received a low protection priority designation, those with an overall score of 4 or 5 received a medium protection priority designation, and those with an overall score of 6 or 7 received a high protection priority designation. Half-score totals were rounded up and placed in the next highest category where applicable.

There were five instances where public view locations originating from street rights-of-way received a high protection priority, despite scoring an overall total of 4 or 5 points. These five locations were recognized as gateway avenues into the downtown basin that deserve special consideration, because of the extraordinary impact of their views. The five locations include: Elberon Avenue, Gilbert Avenue, Lehman Road, Monastery Street, and Sycamore Street. A review of the entire scoring matrix is available in the Appendix. Individual site scores are listed in the Typologies section.

Additional Data

A final piece of data collection involved identifying all privately-owned and City-owned properties from the immediate foreground of a view point down to the base of a hillside. When combined with the protection priority status of various public viewing locations, this information allows for a better understanding of possible opportunities for preservation or potential threats from future development, respectively. These ownership records were derived from CAGIS data obtained in October of 2006.

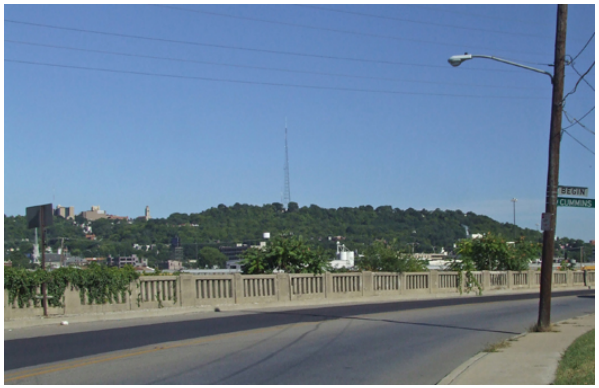
Limitations of Study

The study focused primarily upon identifying and enumerating those public views that are enjoyed from elevated settings such as ridge tops and hillsides. To a lesser extent, it included 11 views of prominent hillsides as seen from selected thoroughfares in the downtown basin. This latter category of views was included to demonstrate that views of hillsides are as significant as views from hillsides. This point was well-understood when Cincinnati unveiled its Environmental Quality - Hillside District (EQ-HD) overlay zoning in 1975.

Methodology

March 2007

Among other design guidelines in the overlay, the City's hearing examiner was empowered to consider the visible impact of new hillside development from various perspectives including the downtown basin. A more in-depth analysis of views of City hillsides may be considered for future work.



View of Clifton and Fairview hillside from Carll Street and Cummins Street.

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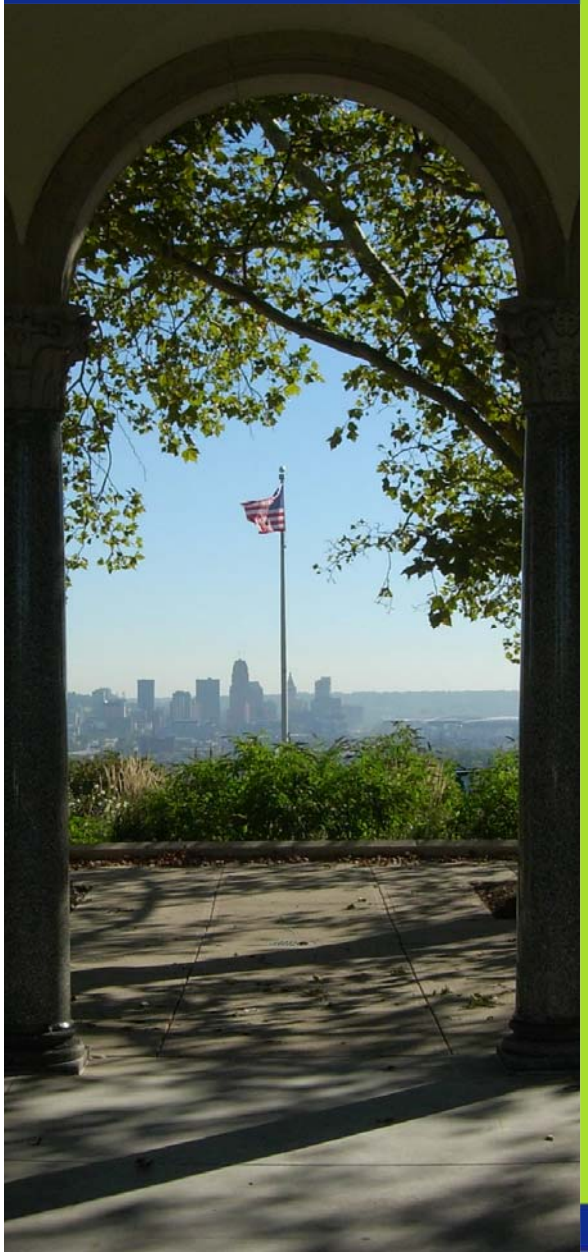

Typologies

Typologies

- Parks
- Parkways
- Public Steps
- Termini
- Valley Floor
- Vistas